

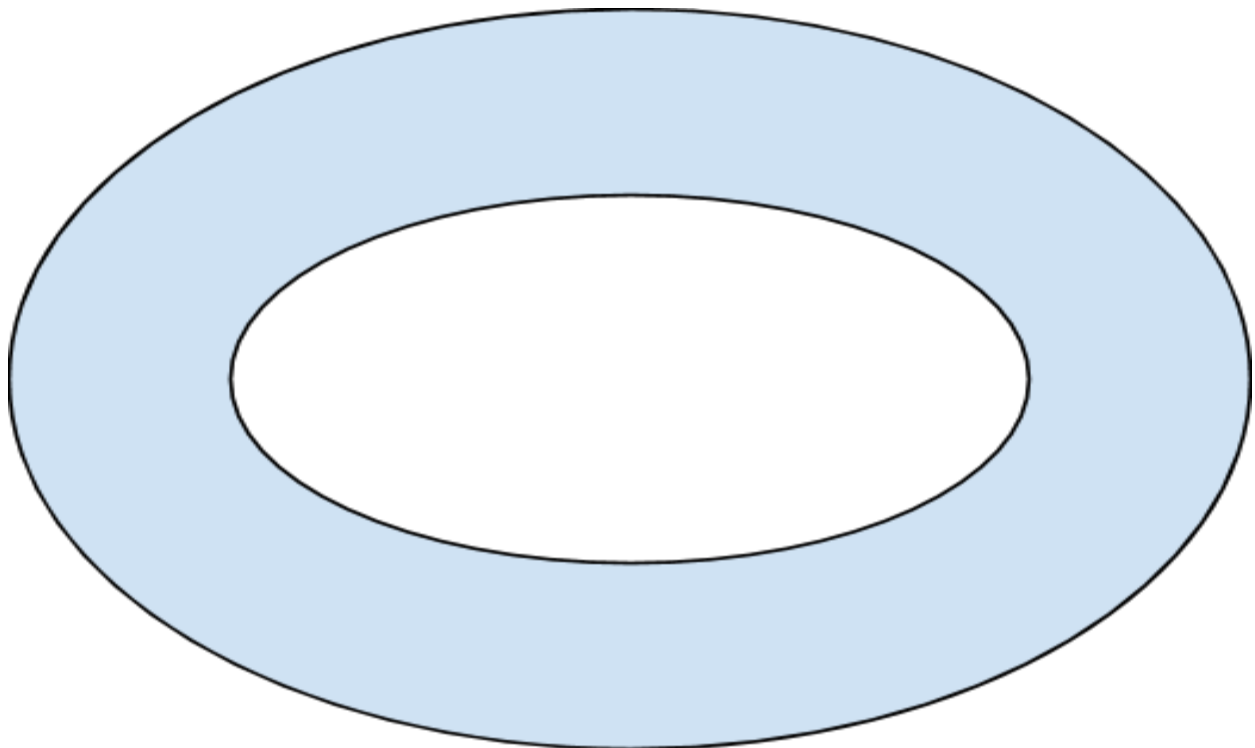
Focus Questions: What are restrictive covenants? How does housing segregation affect our communities?

Warmup

Think of an example of unfair treatment. What happened? How did it make you or the person feel? What did you or the person do? Describe.

The Big “C” [context]

What was happening in the 1950s? Be sure to include events related to segregation.



### The Little "C" [context]

#### Housing Segregation in the 1950s

Source: Paton, Alan. "The Negro in the North." Collier's. 1954.

Excerpt from "Negro in the North"

Alan Paton, South African journalist and writer who traveled to urban areas in American in the West and in the North to observe and interview people about racial segregation

Collier's Magazine, 1954

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6265/>

Housing and employment hold the key to the problem of integration of the Negro into the life of America. The cry of the Negro is no longer, "Let my people go"; it is, "Let my people in." There is hardly a community in America where the purchase of a house by a Negro in a hitherto "white" section does not cause resentment, leading at times to violence. In Louisville, shots are fired and bricks hurled through the windows of Andrew E. Wade, a veteran, and the cross is burned outside his house. In Philadelphia, mobs batter the house bought by Wiley Clark and force him and his wife and four children to sell out and look elsewhere for a home. In Levittown, Long Island, and in Levittown, Pennsylvania, Mr. Levitt builds 33,700 houses, but no Negro need apply.

While I was in the Deep South, gathering material for the first of these articles (Collier's, October 15th), I visited Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and spoke to Lieutenant Melvin Scott. Lieutenant Scott, a Negro, comes from Los Angeles, where, he told me, he felt he was free. Yet I went to Los Angeles, and looked for the sore spot, and it is there, too. I found it also in San Francisco, which, both Negroes and whites told me, is the nation's "freest" city.

The great weapon of the segregator has always been the restrictive covenant, intended to guarantee forever that a white-owned house would pass only into white hands. The covenant has been used against Orientals, Mexicans, Armenians, Hindus, whatever the local prejudice is; Orientals have even used it against Negroes. In 1926 such covenants were upheld by the courts. In 1948 the white neighbors could sue the traitor who sold to a Negro, but could not revoke the sale. In 1953 they could not even sue. The covenant itself has not yet been outlawed; perhaps someday it will be.

But I heard that there is yet another covenant, an unwritten one, that a white realtor must not sell white-owned property to any colored man. That is how I met Mr. George Valentine in California.

Mr. Valentine sold a piece of land in a "white" section to a Negro. Though the neighbors tried to stop it, the colored man built his house and moved in, and lives there today without incident.

But Mr. Valentine had broken the unwritten law, and he has had to pay for it. He was not anxious to talk about it . . .

Mr. Valentine had broken the unwritten law out of his loyalty to America. He wanted to see his country worthy of the moral leadership of the nations.

Mr. Valentine was a realtor in a big way, because he wanted to sell America to the world.

There was another reason why Mr. Valentine did not want to talk much. His son is in the business too, and has just married and started a family. He too has had to pay for his father's breaking of the unwritten law. Big deals that normally would have come his way have been taken elsewhere. Both men look as though they have suffered. The older finds it painful that his son should suffer for his father's principles. The younger finds it painful to discover that one's own friends can make one suffer for doing what is right, but he does not want his father to know how painful it is. I guessed that the father was an upright man, who had never thought to lead anything but an honorable and uneventful life, and that he had brought up his son in the same way. But they had touched American morality on its sorest spot, and life was not uneventful any more.

Into this intimate and painful situation the writer of the novel was welcome to enter, but not the writer for the magazine. Yet the story must surely be told, for it shows clearly the struggle between ideal and practice in this area of American life, and gives its hint that the ideal is very powerful. And the reason why it is powerful is because it is held powerfully by some Americans.

If I had California property to sell, I know where I would go.

### **I Met a Realist**

Mr. George Henry Gordon, of 505 North Fair Oaks, Pasadena, is a realist, not a realtor. That is because he is a colored man. He was cutting his hedge, and the sweat was pouring down his face, but he asked me in. Mr. Gordon took the simple view that an American should be able to live where he is able to buy. He expressed this view with a kind of sturdy serenity which I have seen so often in Negroes, and which I was learning anew was the outward sign of moral strength.

"This unwritten covenant will break down," said Mr. Gordon. "You can't go on doing what is wrong. Not long ago a white owner told me he was willing to sell his house to a colored buyer, but he asked that such prospective buyers should come and see the house after dark.

"I wouldn't do it," said Mr. Gordon. "I told him I did my business in the light."

He did not stand on the table to make this tremendous statement, nor smile apologetically for so extreme a view. He just went right on mopping the sweat from his brow.

"We're too afraid to do right," he said, "and often nothing happens at all. I told one timid colored woman that I was sure she thought much more about the neighbors than they did about her.

"Don't believe what they say about Negroes bringing down property values. They often live in shabby houses because that's all they can get. Look at the nice houses on my own street. Do you think they're worth any less than before? White people take fright, signs go up all round For Sale. If they'd wait, they'd get their price. If they sell in panic, they lose; but it's their own prejudice they're paying for. A month later their house is worth what it used to be, sometimes even more, because of all the Negroes who want to get a house."

"Are you an NAACP member, Mr. Gordon?"

"Yes, I am," he said, "but I think the time has come for us to change our name. We should now be The National Association for the Advancement of All People. Until man rids himself of racial pride and fear, he can't make a better world." . . .

### Reading Questions

1. Who is Alan Paton? What is his purpose in writing this account?
2. In Paton's account, what happens when an African American "purchases a home" in an area that is in the "white section"?
3. According to Paton, what is the restrictive covenant? (Make sure you discuss both, the one he says is upheld by the courts, and the other which is an unwritten one.)
4. Who is Mr. Valentine and what did he do that broke an unwritten law?
5. Why is Mr. Valentine unwilling to discuss his actions?
6. What does Mr. Paton mean when he says, "If I had California property to sell, I know where I would go"?
7. Who is Mr. Henry George Gordon and what is his view on restrictive covenants?
8. Why do you think Mr. Paton interviewed both Mr. Valentine and Mr. Gordon?
9. What do you think Mr. Paton means when he wrote "the great weapon of the segregator has always been the restrictive covenant"?
10. Go back to the Big "C" and Little "C" circles on page 1, and add the key information about housing segregation you learned from reading this primary source.

### Discussion Questions

- a. Do you agree with Mr. Paton's assertion that "the great weapon of the segregator has always been the restrictive covenant"?

- b. Why is housing an issue of equal opportunity and access?
- c. How does housing segregation affect our communities?